

Remarks

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Vice-Chair, the Governor's Task Force on Child Safety

Mr. Chairman, task force colleagues, our community partners, my co-workers of the Department of Economic Security (DES) and all Arizonans who share an interest in the safety of Arizona's children,

I ask your indulgence in my reading my opening statement. It is something I almost never do in public presentations. Today, however the circumstances that bring us together and this moment demand a precision to which a folksy conversation with my audience (my preferred style of presentation) is not well suited.

Before I begin please indulge me in several acknowledgements.

First, to Governor Jan Brewer for her confidence in entrusting me with the significant responsibility of the administration of the Department of Economic Security (DES) on her behalf. And for her unflinching support of me and DES in this important moment. She stated simply that it is her objective that Arizona has the most effective child safety system possible. She then asked what do you need of me to support that objective. One aspect of that support is convening this group of distinguished Arizonans to focus on the fundamentally important issue of child safety in the context of the Arizona child protection system.

Second to our chairman, County Attorney Bill Montgomery.

Mr. Montgomery and I have had several highly engaging conversations about the journey we are about to undertake. He has been thoughtful and measured in the formulation of his ideas around enhancing child safety. We are in capable hands with his leadership. And I am happy to serve as his wingman on this mission.

Next, to each of you, my colleagues, on this task force. I consider it one of the highest honors of my human services career to be teamed with such a distinguished group of Arizona leaders. I know that each of you is committed to lending your expertise and perspective to strengthening Arizona's child safety system and Arizona's children will be better for our efforts

Finally, but in my estimation most importantly my acknowledgement of the heroes and "sheroes" of our Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).

I have been a senior executive in the administration of human services programs and agencies at the federal, state and local levels for almost 20 years. In my estimation Arizona has one of the finest, most competent, capable and dedicated complement of Child safety workers that you could find anywhere in America. It is my honor and privilege to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them in helping to protect the next generation of Arizonans who must encounter our child safety system.

There is no endeavor of public policy, which requires a more delicate balance than the safety and protection of children while preserving and supporting families.

This group of dedicated professionals makes critical, real time decisions each and every day in support of that objective. The vast majority of those decisions and the actions attendant to them are right and go unnoticed. Arizona is fortunate to have such passionate and talented professionals.

Their leader, Veronica Bossack joins us on the Task Force. Mrs. Bossack is a first class administrator who has served Arizona with distinction for 33 years. The two of us have worked diligently to provide a mechanism to bring the voice, expertise and passion of the DCYF labor force into these important deliberations.

While we value and respect our labor force as the subject matter experts, we equally value and respect our many community partners who are joined at the hip with us to do this important work. You will hear from a number of those partners during our convening, but time does not allow for much more than a sampling. As with our labor force, we have been intentional about reaching out to our partners, hearing and understanding their perspectives. They too can be comforted that they have a voice at this table.

We see this Task Force as another welcomed partner in our endeavor to make the best child safety system possible. The last such effort to bring together a group to focus on strengthening Arizona's child safety system was in 2003. While there were many important reforms that came out of that work, I have heard consistently the refrain that significant aspects of what that effort proposed were never implemented. This Task Force has my unequivocal promise to honor our work by implementing the recommendations that come from this body with the approval of Governor Brewer.

As we get down to our deliberations there are two final thoughts I would like to leave with those who are closely following our work.

As important as the work of the Task Force is, it cannot, nor was it intended to address every aspect of the child safety system. The system is extremely dense, complex and multi-faceted. While we will

focus on small slices of the system and make recommendations to improve those areas of focus, most importantly we will set a framework for our continuing efforts at improving the system. In some circles I have been criticized for the phrase, 'the objective of having the most effective child safety system is a journey, not a destination'. What I mean by that is that we must be committed to a system which is constantly challenging, growing, evolving, learning and changing. If we ever rest, we will have failed Arizona's children. This Task Force is a mile marker in that never-ending journey.

Finally, our system can only be as strong as the collective force of more than 6 million Arizonans. While the Governor, the Legislature, DES and our partners have an important role to play, every Arizonan has a role to play in making this system work. Every person that calls this great state home has to be part of the collective eyes and ears of our community on behalf of our children.

During my brief tenure of seven months six beautiful children who had prior involvement with the child protection system have had their lives snuffed out by maddening and incomprehensible actions of a parent, guardian or care giver. We cannot make a system that will end all child tragedies, but we can honor the memories of Janie Buelna, Anays Carimbocas, Justin Oaks, Danielle Martinez-Sepulveda, Kyleb Freeman and Jacob Gibson and so many others by being deliberate, methodical, strategic, courageous and unflinching in our pursuit of the best system possible.

Let's get after it.